

Study provides evidence that community-based violence prevention program is successful

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A study by researchers at Bradley Hasbro Children's Research Center confirmed that teens who attend classes about relationships have lower tolerance for aggression and dating violence. Healthier dating attitudes can be acquired after even brief involvement in an anti-violence curriculum.

Co-authored by Meredith C. Joppa, Ph.D., and Christie J. Rizzo, Ph.D., researchers and colleagues on behalf of the BHCRC, the study was published in the *Journal of School Health*.

"Adolescent dating violence is a huge problem in the United States, and schools are being urged to address this issue," said Joppa. "Some states have even legislated this type of training. Given the limited time available to implement prevention programming during the school day, brief programs are needed, and we tested one such curriculum to gauge its effectiveness."

Researchers learned that even as few as five lessons from a community-based dating violence prevention program can effect changes in student attitudes and behaviors.

According to the Centers for Disease Control in 2012, nine percent of U.S. high school students reported physical dating violence in the previous 12 months. It is a significant public health problem that

characterizes a large percentage of teen-dating relationships. Male youth victimization rates vary by study, from 6 to 38 percent, and their perpetration rates vary from 11 to 20 percent. Female youth victimization rates range from 8 to 57 percent and their perpetration rates are higher than the males, varying from 28 to 33 percent.

"Violence ranges from emotional and verbal abuse to physical and sexual abuse," said Rizzo. "The good news is, good relationship skills can be taught. Measuring behavior change is a critical component of dating violence prevention research and is rarely found in studies of adolescent dating [violence prevention programs](#). This study demonstrates that teens can modify their cognitions and behaviors about dating violence."

In this study, 225 tenth-grade students in a large public high school in Massachusetts, who had their parents' consent, were enrolled in the Katie Brown Educational Program's five-session, dating violence prevention curriculum. The control group continued to take health class as usual, without discussions of dating violence. At the conclusion of the program and three months later, the teens in the anti-violence program showed changes in their attitudes, behaviors and knowledge about relationships.

The Katie Brown Education Program is based in Fall River, Massachusetts and works with schools throughout Southern New England to deliver their dating [violence prevention](#) curriculum. Their curriculum uses observational learning, discussion, role-play and modeling of health relationship skills. Each session included lecture, discussion, group and individual activities, handouts and worksheets. The materials included educational components such as identifying types of violence, rights in relationships, and warning signs of dating violence, as well as key skills components such as conflict resolution, communications skills, and taking responsibility for choices and actions. For example, the facilitator engages the group in a game called "agree/disagree" to help the teens realize their conceptions about wants

and needs in a relationship. She will then lead them in a discussion about the traits of healthy and unhealthy dating relationships.

"We found important changes in attitudes and knowledge among students who received the Katie Brown Educational Program curriculum in comparison to those teens taking the usual health class," said Rizzo. "Identifying an efficacious and brief curriculum is crucial, as brief programming may offset the burden of dating violence education on school resources and can be incorporated into any high school health curriculum."

Provided by Lifespan

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